

Education Governance Responses
Middlebury Meeting (3/14/07) - Middlebury Union High School

51 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Local control > community focus/identity//connection
Local oversight
Community members can talk to local board members
Community “ownership” of school
SU provides excellent support services to small schools who work for small boards
Opportunity for educational diversity
SU has common curriculum goals, standards across towns in SU
Local citizens make educational and financial decisions for local school. Local control of school budget
Option for floor votes over Australian Ballot votes
Local decisions affect local tax rates
Accountability for finances and quality is out of the hands of bureaucrats and in the hands of local citizens and taxpayers
Problems in education come from state/fed interference, we are high in achievement now.
Easier to facilitate change
Easier to facilitate curriculum development
Less travel
Quicker response to school needs
Board members are seen as more accessible
Board members knowledgeable about how school works
Board members serve as resource to community
System encourages citizen engagement
Teachers feel they know board
Current system has produced excellent results
Local control
Community values
More parent participate
Facilities
Easier contact with board
Local solution earlier
Will it be more dollars?
Community identity
Community involvement
Individualized decision making
Local liaison
Community basedculture, sovereignty of towns, center/glue, taxpayer more directly connected
Environmental sense of place, energy usage
Small schools good for kids - how small?...known, responded to
Local board - better of your community – breadth and depth

Local school is center of our community
Better representation
Can better use its community resources
Closer family – community involvement
People know/care what goes on
Local people come even not to complain
Style counts – we are diverse – need diversity of leadership styles
If you know your school you have a better chance at budgets
Trust passes budgets
Accessibility to board and enhanced responsibility and accountability
Our school populations are different – special needs can be challenging but carefully monitored
1400 people actively engaged in

Disadvantages

Micromanaging school and principal
Limited resources under small school
SU decision making process slow, unwieldy
Lack of control over union schools; disparity in level of control between union and local schools
Coordination for united efforts is more difficult
Duplicative efforts at SU level are inefficient
Cost control in terms of salaries and benefits
Unwieldy to manage
Lots of meetings for the super.
Each school has different curriculum (yet they feed into same HS)
Higher cost?
Higher number of adults per student in each building
Each school has different policies
Lack of qualified volunteers for school boards
Different contracts for similar jobs
Too many school boards
Difficult to share personnel and resources
Duplication of tasks > increased cost
Difficult to curriculums
Difficult line of command
Governance – equitable no direct voter input
Inequity of resources
Qualified supt.
Number of boards/meetings
Negotiated contracts
Admin.cost duplication
Curriculum/prep
Transportation
Utilization of personnel
Different policies
Inefficient/ budget inter-related but fragmented
Discourages attention to detail from centralized staff
Encourages admin. involvement by volunteers
Vulnerable to mistakes
Potential lack of consistent student preparation

People resources spread too thin superintendent, school board members
Can be too small cost, culture, educ. resources
Disadvantage in negotiations
Complex business processes
The Department of Education on completely different timeline than us

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

Establish consistency of educational philosophy (strengthen)
Greater rationalization of administrative structures
?"Efficiency" .. but what does that mean?
School choice enabling act
Possibility for easier K-12 program cohesiveness
Potential for less administrative costs
Possibility for statewide teacher contract
Equal resources
1 person – 1 vote
Shared personnel/better use
Apparent reduction in admin. costs
1 set of policies
Curriculum: coordinated
Efficient management
Negotiated contracts
Creative use of facilities
Consolidation of grades
Purchasing: bulk
Less bureaucracy, therefore quicker change
 (administrative, curricular, facilities, student body)
One contract – easier to administer
Same policies
Shape ideas
Budget integration K-12
Curriculum integration K-12
Enhanced accountability
Efficiency of resources
Job of super different, may be easier
More efficient decision-making
Board votes weighted more representationally
Combined buying power
Synch. Curriculum
Share resources

Disadvantages

There's more than one school governance problem but this only provides one solution
Costs will go up
Small schools become less important
School choice enabling act

Weighted voting – makes for unhealthy board dynamics
Loss of local control
Illusion of efficiency
Local taxpayers will have less oversight – easier for bureaucrats to hide inefficiencies and waste
Weighted votes is not fair representation (one person from each town is not right – need multiple points of view)
Harder to be creative or make changes in a bigger system
Taxation without representation is tyranny
Ed tax are biggest portion of tax bill- we should have more representation
Will create a mind-numbing bureaucracy of EPIC proportion – AMEN
Addressing individual community needs
Weighted vote
Less use of representative
Taxing system
Weighted votes cause one town/person to have significantly more “power” than other board members
Would politicize the selection of board members
Limits citizens’ access to board members
Fewer points of view are expressed at board meetings
It’s difficult for a single person to represent opinions from large area
Loss of local personality
Decreased public involvement
Board structure – equity?
One governance model doesn’t fit all
Potential loss of students
Insufficient data to answer this
No studies and or data provided
Managerial efficiency one budget
Where is the cost and testing data from the current supervisory districts?
Distance from commu
Disenfranchise towns
General to a fault
Suggestion of efficiency lacks hard data (programmatically and economically)
Less vested board
Avoids the issues by distraction of the governance discussion
Community engagement
One size does not fit all
Urban vs. rural split
Parental involvement in school governance
May>transportation time for students and cost
Flexibility to respond to our different populations
Doesn’t eliminate paid staff – no cost savings
Structure will promote more uniformity of educational experience
Thoughts
-super will have more power + -?
- Is corporate model appropriate for educational setting?
Central nature of model in contrast to Vermont’s rural spread
Loss of community identity

Debrief Comments:

Don't impose systemic solutions to discrete problems

Better to clarify/promote best practices for superintendents, get them support they need

When consolidation happens, will the Dept of Ed be there to support those communities?

Create incentives rather than imposing solutions.

It's about process—we may agree on where we should eventually end up, but this is not the best way to get there.

This is as bad as cutting the legislature from one-town/one-member to multi-town districts

All children in the state are our responsibility; parochial view is not in the best interests of the state's children

Need statewide incentives to consolidate/restructure

Balance economy of scale with meeting educational needs

Don't believe that structural change will significantly contain costs driven by special ed, health insurance, energy, NCLB compliance

Thanks for asking for this input

How does Hawaii handle their educational system? (just 1 superintendent)

How do other states do it?

Make use of interactive TV

Tax rate – how determined?

One negotiated contract for state

Issue driver's license at graduation

Use state contract for purchases

Funding for decoupling so that hours of instruction increased in high school

No addition of new courses or activities

Gifted programs – magnet schools

Research data on extended school year, before changing 180 day year

All teachers be reading teachers

Who will make the decision?

We do not want to change governance

No more unfunded mandates

Demand full funding of special ed from feds

We need new contract mechanisms for health care, salary,

We are furious that comm.. is not here to listen to us tonight who will listen to us tomorrow

Honesty in legislature – if you raise taxes for ed. give it all to ed fund...don't divert to Gen. Fund

Concern-slow down....need more deliberation....need more buy-in

Not a money saver initially

Ideas-advisory council for each school

Rely more on supervisory unions as cooperative purchasing agents for bulk buying

What can the state do to help control costs (healthcare, special education, mandates) instead of pointing the finger at local board

Create a statewide, but community based program to encourage parents to read to children starting in infancy. This is a community volunteer effort. It should be basic and low cost and connected to town libraries.

Financial inducement to change

Curriculum Development (unified)

Will there be weighted votes?

Federal government should stop sending down unfunded mandates

Need statewide teacher/principal/superintendent contracts (money issues should not be negotiated by board)

Keep the focus on educating our children

Focus on keeping our kids in Vermont workforce

Show us the cost savings data

What would we be giving up for the cost savings

Show us how this change would increase the quality of education

Final comments

White paper doesn't define prob. that is trying to be solved

Indiv. grp.process for this disc. is productive; dif.from model being proposed

Fewer people doing same/more work as larger number currently

Want system to hear more voices (democratic), not nec. simpler

Why does com. want fewer people to scrutinize school doings?

Caucus in Mplr. Received concrete proposals, not abstract com's

Imp.for towns to work together because +of resource pressures and shared commit. to children

Concern re: fast track in legislature

Balance efficiencies with values

In W.P., highlights school choice which should be part of disc. Coord. Cur. Is positive but can already happen with strong leadership

This debate involves many people>people=better thinking

Clarification re weighting; collapses diversity